
DRAFT SOGI POLICY DEVELOPMENT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does the word SOGI mean?

SOGI is an acronym for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and it refers to the idea that some people will identify themselves as different than their biological gender, or differently than participants in a heterosexual relationship.

What is a “draft” policy or regulations and guidelines?

The word “draft” means that final decisions about the wording of a policy, its regulations or guidelines is not finalized at the point of consultation. The Board of Education will receive written feedback from our school district community before they make a final consideration and decision on the wording of the SOGI policy, its regulations and guidelines.

What is the difference between regulations and guidelines?

Regulations support policy by stating what we will do in support of the ideals or goals of a policy. Guidelines support policy by providing the details of how the work embedded in regulations will occur and what it would look like.

Does having a policy about SOGI mean that the school district is promoting or choosing a particular view about SOGI?

The Board of Education directed that a policy be developed that outlined the district’s commitment to educating students, staff and parents about SOGI issues and the promotion of a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Do other BC school districts have SOGI policies?

Yes, school districts are places of learning and it is important that school districts ensure that all students and families feel safe and included. Many districts have both a District Code of Conduct and a SOGI policy where a district’s commitment and guidelines to supporting students with education and processes regarding SOGI issues is expressed. The Ministry is supportive of schools having SOGI policies and provides resources for this work.

Are students who identify themselves as a “gender different or gender queer” welcome in our schools”?

All students are welcomed in our schools and should feel safe and valued, respected and accepted as learners. Learning to read, to be successful in math, to collaborate and to be creative is not connected to a gender. We want all of our students, their families and the staff who support them, to feel that they have every opportunity to aspire to be their very best.

What if I have a different point of view about SOGI issues?

The draft policy was written to be focused on our students. We understand that there will be multiple perspectives about SOGI matters just as there are on many other topics. School districts are responsible for safe, orderly and caring schools which are inclusive of all students. Respectful learning environments are key elements in successful learning and all students

should be supported to thrive and achieve. In the writing of a SOGI policy we are focused on our students as learners. Respectful feedback from all perspectives will be helpful in the creation of positive and purposeful policy.

Does the Ministry of Education expect our school district to have a SOGI policy?

The Ministry of Education expects that all school districts follow the expectations set out by both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the BC Human Rights Code. In the fall of 2016, the Ministry directed schools districts to update their District Codes of Conduct to include the addition of wording about gender identity and gender expression.

Do we currently teach about SOGI issues in our schools now?

Yes, there have been learning outcome expectations regarding human sexuality and social and emotional development for many decades. Included in these expectations is the idea that at age appropriate times, students will learn about human sexuality from both a biological and social emotional perspective as well as, through a societal inclusive lens. These learning outcomes are intended to be factually based and without judgement or personal perspective.

Will teachers and other professionals be trained to work with our children in matters related to SOGI?

Teachers and other professionals are trained and well suited to connect with student on SOGI issues. There are currently district staff and health professionals who work in our classrooms. Materials are constantly updated to provide classroom teachers with best practice lessons, which can be used with their students in classrooms.

Is SOGI 123 the curriculum that we have to use in our district?

SOGI 123 is a resource designed by the Ministry of Education and partner groups as a suggested resource. It is not a curriculum. Our district will choose resources from a broad and best practice spectrum to supplement our classrooms. Richmond has excellent teachers and district staff who design inclusive lessons plans that are frequently used in classrooms.

Who wrote this draft SOGI Policy, Regulations and Guidelines?

With the oversight of the Policy Committee of the Board of Education, a working group of stakeholder partners, (Richmond Teachers Association, the Richmond District Parents Association, the Richmond Administrators Association, Richmond Management Administrative Professionals, Canadian Union of Public Employees and Secondary School Student representatives all worked together to research, review and write this draft policy.

What will happen will the feedback that I provide?

The trustees of the Board of Education and some senior staff will see all of the respectful written feedback that is received at the school district office, at the Information sessions or on the Lets's Talk website dedicated to gathering SOGI feedback. Senior staff will work to use this feedback appropriately in the revised and final draft for the Board's consideration. Trustees will use the consultation feedback and will review the final draft to inform their final decision as they vote on the draft SOGI policy.

What opportunities for community members will be provided by the district to increase SOGI awareness?

There will be two open house information sessions held for the public. There is also a dedicated Let's Talk website that includes information, resources and the opportunity to provide feedback.

What does positive social change look like?

A shift in thinking towards greater inclusion and respect, as well as safety for all. Positive social change is a gradual improvement towards greater awareness and understanding.

Why do we need a separate SOGI Policy? Isn't this covered by the District Code of Conduct?

A separate SOGI policy will highlight and create safety for students and show examples of acceptable behaviour. It is important to ensure that there are teaching and learning resources for parents, students, staff so that we can create understanding. This is also an opportunity to outline expectations for staff and students.

Why does the LGBTQ+ need to feel safe?

Every student and adult has the right to feel safe.

What if I do not want my child being exposed to SOGI affirming education?

You are encouraged to have a conversation with the administration at the school level.

How will staff receive training on this topic?

Staff will receive training on this topic in a variety of ways, including:

- Professional development days
- Staff meetings
- Guest speakers
- Health professionals
- Resources and best practices

What outcomes will result for staff and students within our schools as a result of the implementation of the SOGI policy?

Our schools will feel safer for all students, staff and community members and will have more consistent guidelines and resources to refer to.

If a child or adult does not feel comfortable making a complaint at their school, what options do they have?

There are numerous resources available, including:

- Students - ERASE Bullying website.
- RTA and CUPE collective agreements and representatives
- Assistant Superintendents, Deputy or Superintendent
- Human tribunal
- Ombudsman
- Ministry of Education
- Worksafe BC

How will the district take action when there is a complaint about discrimination?

All concerns and complaints will be taken seriously with an investigation into the allegations.

How will the district support PACS?

The district will provide resources and materials, and encourage administrators to work with PAC chairs. Currently, the districts Learning Services Department is developing an information package that will be distributed to PACs.

Is it allowable for students to be told what washroom or change room they should use?

No.

Does my child have to change in the same room with someone who identifies as a different gender?

No. Any person who is uncomfortable using a shared facility will be offered a private space. All students and staff have a right to safe and private facilities on and off school sites.

Is there a timeline for changing to private stall washroom and change room facilities?

The timeline is dependent on operational conditions and limitations. Most schools have had single-stall washrooms converted into gender-neutral washrooms.

Who is facilitating the washroom and change room upgrades? What is the budget and where does it come from?

The Richmond School District's Maintenance and Operations department will be facilitating the upgrades. The budget is allocated annually as part of the district capital plan and comes from the district operating account.

How will the advisory committee be selected?

Stakeholder groups will propose members.

What does "self-identification" mean?

To be addressed by the name or pronoun that corresponds to your gender identity.

Why are pronouns so important?

It is important for people to use terminology and mirror the language people use for themselves as it is directly related to one's identity and helps to create awareness and sensitivity.

What are the different pronouns used corresponding to gender identity?

The pronouns used for each gender vary greatly from person to person. The best way to clarify would be to ask.

What pronouns can students choose in self-identification?

The pronoun would be determined by the student but may include She/Her, He/Him, They/Them, Ze/Xe/Zir/Zirself.

Are there consequences if someone uses the wrong pronoun by mistake?

We are a learning organization, therefore the goal is to educate, not to punish.

Will there be GSA's in all schools?

GSAs will be introduced upon need and where there is interest.